

E

286

T29

1908

Ferree, Barr.

Sentiment as a National
asset.



Class E 286

Book T 29.

PRESENTED BY

1908

Sentiment as a National Asset

AN ORATION

DELIVERED AT THE

FOURTH OF JULY CELEBRATION

IN

TENAFLY, NEW JERSEY

JULY 4, 1908

BY

BARR FERREE

[New York: No. 7 Warren Street]

19
1921

Gift
Author
(Person)
11 JUL 1908

31

SENTIMENT AS A NATIONAL ASSET

AN ORATION DELIVERED AT THE FOURTH OF JULY
CELEBRATION AT TENAFLY, NEW JERSEY, ON
JULY FOURTH, 1908.

My Fellow Citizens and Neighbors:—

We may congratulate ourselves that out of the three hundred and sixty-five or three hundred and sixty-six days of the year we are able to devote one to the glorification of our country. The Fourth of July still remains a day of universal national significance. It is the day of days for telling each other how great we are; what we have done; what we hope to do.

National greatness cannot be achieved by mere reiteration of statements. To say that a thing is so, does not bring it into existence. Mere talk, which is purely talk, accomplishes so little it might better be left unsaid. There must be action behind every undertaking; there must be work before there can be results; and there must, above all, be merit in every single thing that looks to accomplishment, whether it be personal or private, individual or national. This is the universal law to which there is no exception and from which there is no escape. Transitory or momentary success is no success at all, and has no more real effect than the gust of wind that blows your hat off, and is gone before you have had time to realize it has arrived.

And so, while the orators who are hurling forth their eloquence to-day may, for the moment, satisfy you that you live in a great and glorious country, their flood of words will produce no effect at all unless their hearers know, feel and realize the stupendous volume of solid fact, of concrete reality, of absolute proof, that must be behind every truthful word. And more: for there must also be aroused in the heart of every one whose ears are ravished by these glowing utterances, a personal sense of personal responsibility in all this greatness. This is the great fact. The great lesson of to-day is not the imperishable greatness of our land, but the indisputable, unavoidable and essential part each of us as citizens must contribute to this greatness. And believe me, unless we do make this personal contribution, orators and talkers to the contrary and notwithstanding, there will be no solid reality on which a single good word can be said.

We hear much of our national greatness; it would be better if we did more and listened less. What individual contribution has any of us made—you and I, good friends and neighbors—in the last ten years, or five years, or one year, to our national greatness? I mean a real contribution, something that will truly help this Nation in a helpful way, and which will live after us when we are dead and gone. In the last seven years our Chief Magistrate has left unsaid no word that could be said on this grand theme. No one has ever talked so much about the greatness of our country as Theodore Roosevelt; and could talk alone have convinced the world of our national supremacy, his talk, and the glamor of his mighty office would have been all convincing and all satisfying. But the presidential great-

ness is a belligerent greatness; a greatness of the fist and the gun, of the cannon and the battleship.

Real greatness is a lasting greatness; a greatness for your time and mine; a greatness that endures; a greatness that future ages will look back to with pride as something inconceivably fine and grand. And the world's history shows that this greatness is not achieved by talk and fighting, but by doing and by peace; by action and by work; by the mind, which in the end triumphs, and eternally triumphs, over the body.

The great fact in American greatness is that it is a material greatness. It is a greatness of dollars and cents, of wealth and science. It is not a greatness we have bought, but a greatness we have achieved by the accumulation of money. We are prosperous because we have an abundance of money, plenty of people and plenty of work. All this makes for material success, and hence for material greatness. We measure our greatness in tons of pig iron, in bushels of wheat, in tonnage of vessels, in miles of railroad, in the billions of our financial and commercial exchanges. The figures that measure our financial and manufacturing transactions are staggering in their immensity and utterly incomprehensible as to their totals. There is no duller reading than the Statistical Abstracts published by the national government, but there is no truer barometer to the achievements of our national greatness than those endless pages of figures.

Great? Of course we are great, and stupendously so. But I must insist that this greatness is the material greatness of the dollar. It is not the greatness of the mind and intellect; and in all the world mind is the only thing that counts and

endures. It is the immaterial that is really great and really lasting. The material is with us to-day; the immaterial will carry our name down through the ages so long as record remains of contemporary civilization.

No people ever achieved such immortal greatness as the ancient Greeks. The monuments of their commercial supremacy among the people of their own time have utterly passed away; and only the monuments of their intellect remain: their wonderful architecture; their supreme sculptures; their intensely intellectual philosophy; their redounding oratory. The mind of Greece still leads the culture of the world, leads it powerfully and supremely. Its nations have passed away, but the wonderful fruit of the Greek mind still ripen for us to grasp and make our own if we but will.

This is true greatness; and is a kind that is not measured by your ability to knock your neighbor down with your fist, to buy his little property or to ruin him in business for your own advantage. It is a greatness that has stood the test of all time, and which looms the larger as the centuries move slowly on. It is a greatness of which we Americans have hardly anything at all, but which we need, and need badly.

There are many ways in which this higher, nobler greatness can be helped and furthered. I have only time to speak of one, and of that but briefly. I want to ask your attention to the value of sentiment as a national asset. Most of us know what sentiment is. Very many, no doubt, think it is a state of mind that is especially observable in very young men and women. A very fine thing that sentiment is; a joyous sort of sentiment, that is charmingly calculated to

give delight to the persons most concerned. This is a personal sentiment, and we may be sure it is quite as well developed in foreign lands as with us.

National sentiment is something quite different. It is love of country; it is interest in our past; it is faith in our future; it is personal feeling for our land and everything concerned with it. It is something without form or body; a quality; a state of mind, if you will; something you cannot see, or touch, or feel; but something that acts and reacts on the heart and mind. A brilliant speaker once defined art as something that stirred the imagination; and immediately added that the more the imagination is stirred, the greater is the work of art. Something of the same kind of a definition may be applied to national sentiment. Yet it is beyond explanation, beyond concrete expression, beyond mere verbal phrasing. It is a true heart sense that we may feel, but cannot visualize outside ourselves.

We must go back to the very fundamentals of our beginnings as a Nation if we would realize, as we should, the value of sentiment in our own present-day life and work. For whatever we are to-day, and whatever we may hope to be in the future, is due to the greatness of our past, and to the good men and the noble deeds of times that came before our own.

Our country is rich in memories and memorials that give rise to national sentiment, and which individualize and crystalize the most precious facts of our nationality. Who can stand unmoved within the walls of Faneuil Hall, that cradle of American Liberty in Boston, which has been the scene of so many notable episodes in our early national life? Who will not bare his head in awed remembrance in

the paneled room in Independence Hall in Philadelphia, in which the immortal Declaration was adopted? Who will stand stolidly besides the grave of Washington at Mount Vernon; or look slightly upon the hoary earthworks of Valley Forge; or upon the monumented battlefield of Gettysburg; or on the scene of that final treaty at Appomattox? Truly are these great national shrines of world-wide interest and renown, landmarks in national history and in world history, before which every human being who knows but the barest outlines of their story must stand awed and abased. All America contains nothing more precious, and nowhere else does national sentiment rise to loftier heights.

Fortunate and thrice blessed are the communities that contain such sacred memorials within their midst! Yet they belong to each of us, as intimately, as personally, as truly, as to those who live beneath their shadows. America knows no localism in its national shrines; and the buildings and lands where the great scenes of our splendid national drama have been enacted, are the chief treasures of our citizens everywhere.

They should be. That is the real point. They should be. As a matter of fact they cannot be unless we individually awake to their personal value to us. And this value is a sentimental value; it is beyond expression in dollars; it has nothing to do with bushels and tons; it is quite outside the influence of bank exchanges. It is a value of the heart and mind, hence, incapable of measurement, the most prized of all our national possessions.

Nor is the interest of the sentimental patriot limited to the world-compelling interest of our most important na-

tional shrines. We must not ignore any single fact in our country or in our history. We must be interested in, even if we cannot love, every physical, visible fact by which we are surrounded. We cannot be at home unless we are satisfied with the place in which we live. Our patriotic interest, in short, must not be concentrated upon distant and remote buildings in Boston and Philadelphia; or upon far-away battlefields that we perhaps know better by name than by sight; but must begin with our own homes and houses, take in our own hills and valleys, include our own woods and rivulets. National sentiment may not begin with the home, but it must include it; and with the home it must include all that surrounds it and helps to make it.

Did it ever occur to you that you were rendering a distinct service to this Nation by being satisfied with the place in which you live? I believe this to be true, and profoundly true. There is no nobler sentiment than to be completely satisfied with the place in which one lives. Local pride and local interest are the foundations on which national pride and national faith and hope are imperishably upheld and enthroned. It is well to begin at the beginning; and as the home and family are primary facts from which the Nation is evolved, so interest in one's own home and house are the primary factors which in their ultimate stage constitute national sentiment.

I am aware that it is sometimes difficult to take the interest in one's immediate surroundings that one ought to take. It is sometimes hard to be completely satisfied with the community in which one finds oneself, or to which one voluntarily attaches oneself. But never buy a house and

then proceed to hate it; never enter a community and then proceed to revile it; never encourage dislike and feed yourself with the notion that because everything is not just as you want it, therefore all must be bad.

There is a patriotic value in personal attachment to one's own house and soil that does not appear always to be completely appreciated in this remarkable country of ours. How can it be, when the continuous occupancy of a house by the descendants of the original inhabitants for a hundred or two hundred years is cited as an historical curiosity of the first rank? How can it be, when the gentlemen who are industriously engaged in the promotion of the sale of real estate offer, as an inducement to immediate purchase, the interesting prophecy that prices are rising and that in a few years you can sell out at a handsome profit and move elsewhere? How can it be, when the tax assessor is loading assessments onto your property, so that its value rises in leaps and bounds, and in a very short time you may find it cheaper to sell than to pay taxes?

All these things are wrong, and grievously wrong; and while we may think they are matters of no especial interest, perhaps of no especial value, this is only because this indifference is a developed indifference; a state of mind and feeling we have fallen into, without a realization of the tendency it actually has, or of the end it must finally reach. It is one of the too numerous themes on which, as a nation, we are drifting, drifting, heedless of the end, and regardless of the present.

The first of all requirements of good citizenship is satisfaction with our country. We cannot be faithful Americans unless we are faithful to America. We cannot be faithful

to America unless we are faithful to our own immediate surroundings; faithful to our own state and county, faithful to our own borough and home. This faithfulness in its highest form—the only one that really counts—must be impersonal and general, and be forever everlasting. It should not be dependent on the placing of an electric light fixture at some convenient point; or on the laying of a sidewalk which our immediate superiors in government permit us to put down at our own expense. It should not end with the completion of some supposed public improvement in which we may be personally interested; but it should be definite and lasting, and continuous with one's sojourn in the spot one has selected as a place of residence.

If this interest does not come naturally, it must be developed and nourished. It must be encouraged and promoted. It must be helped and furthered. We need to know and to realize, in the most thorough way possible, that each of us is a fellow citizen of a common country; that each of us is but a part of a colossal aggregation whose stupendous growth has been without rival in history, and whose vastness and material achievements constitute one of the marvels of all time.

A sacred and natural pride is caused by association with so glorious an entity; and there is no better way of developing this pride than by personal interest in one's immediate surroundings. This is really much more important than in creating an interest in a distant battlefield or in some remotely situated structure. The land around us is within easy reach and is our own. For ourselves, here in Northern New Jersey, it abounds in spots of natural

beauty and picturesque interest. One should live here because one wants to live here, and not because one simply happens to own real estate in this vicinity.

The relations between local pride and national pride are everywhere close and certain; they are ever overlapping, and are intertwined with the most intimate association and development. One may think one may have one without the other; one may delude oneself with the notion that one is a true American and faithful because one cherishes the Declaration of Independence, while feeding his heart with the most dreadful dislike of his own place of residence and all that is concerned with it. I know the local government is not always kindly nor even wise; that it is often conducted in a narrow and selfish way, and means heavy costs to property owners in the guise of so-called "improvements." There are other things, too, that do not always seem to be as satisfactory as they might or should. But I cannot believe these causes of dissatisfaction and of friction to be permanent, nor these annoyances to be lasting nor always unavoidable.

If they are, wherein is the value of our boasted citizenship? For what did our fathers bleed and suffer? For what does our flag throw the mantle of its thrice colored material above our heads? For what this day and all it means? If there be ought in the present time that is not as it should be, look back into our past, study what our Nation was in its beginning, find out for what our forefathers labored, and seek in the sentiment of the past a cure for the ills and failings of the present!

Sentiment? We need it every day and every hour. We need it in our business; we need it in our homes; we need

it in our local government ; we need it in our national life. We need to value the immaterial aspect of things more, and the material less. We need more of beauty and less of utility. We need more of the ideal and less of the real. We need to value more the thoughtful man and less he who has simply accumulated bags of money. This is a very materialistic age, in which success is too often gauged by the size of one's bank account. Yet the world's immortals include few names of the very rich, and none at all of the persons whose wealth constituted their single claim to recognition.

But a few of us can hope for immortality in this world ; yet I submit it as an indisputable and universal measure of success. It is the sentimentalist and the idealist who win out in the long run. Mind is the only thing that counts in the world ; and the most intellectual and therefore the most successful people are those who give place to their poets and their artists, to their thinkers and their teachers, to their students and their philosophers. A man's success cannot rightly be numbered by the money he wins ; but by what he does and what he is. "For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the world, and lose his own soul?" The sentimentalist has no peer, and his value to the nation at large is a national asset of supreme importance.

LIBRARY OF CONGRESS



0 011 802 096 0